Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works

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Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works

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Edited by
Johanna Hartmann, Christine Marks,
and Hubert Zapf

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Introduction

Siri Hustvedt's reputation and public presence have been growing steadily in the 21st century. She is recognized internationally as one of the most widely read and appreciated contemporary American writers. She has drawn manifold responses to her work from different disciplines and areas of thought and has been a frequent contributor to literary, artistic, and scholarly events. In her significance and stature as a public intellectual, she is not merely an American writer but a transnational, cosmopolitan author, who develops new forms not only of literary narrative but of interdisciplinary thought and writing, bringing together otherwise separated genres and branches of knowledge in a broad spectrum between literature and philosophy, historiography and art, psychoanalysis and neuroscience, narrative and medicine. One hallmark of her works is an intermedial approach to literary production, in which different forms of art and their complex mutual relationships with language and narrative are constitutive of her style and her specific analysis of human perception, identity, and communication in contemporary societies.

In view of Siri Hustvedt's presence and international reputation in literary and intellectual culture, academic response to her work in terms of systematic scholarly analysis and research has so far lagged behind. While her writings have been extremely well received in the general public, they still await more sustained attention in academia. There are signs, however, that this is currently changing. Several monographs on her work have been published recently,[1] and the number of Ph.D. projects and research networks connected with her work is increasing steadily. The present volume further highlights Siri Hustvedt as an important literary figure and her impact on interdisciplinary research in literary studies and the humanities more generally. The volume comprises a collection of essays by scholars from various interdisciplinary fields and perspectives, illuminating the wide range of topics, ideas, forms, genres, and aesthetic modes that Hustvedt employs to convey her complex analyses of contemporary life both in her narratives and her essays.

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1 Christine Marks. 2014. *"I am because you are": Relationality in the Works of Siri Hustvedt*. American Studies 244. Heidelberg: Winter; Corinna Sophie Reipen. 2014. *Visuality in the Works of Siri Hustvedt*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang; Johanna Hartmann. 2016. *Literary Visuality in Siri Hustvedt's Works: Phenomenological Perspectives*. text und theorie. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.

Siri Hustvedt comes from a background that is both recognizably American and yet also transatlantic and cosmopolitan in orientation. She grew up in the bilingual household of a family of Norwegian immigrants in which language and literary culture played a significant role. Her mother was a French instructor and librarian, and her father taught Norwegian language, literature, and history at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. During high school, Hustvedt wrote her first poems and lived for a time in Norway, and later studied history at St. Olaf College in Minnesota. She went on to study at Columbia University in New York, where she received her Ph.D. in English literature with a thesis on Charles Dickens titled *Figures of Dust: Language and Identity in Charles Dickens.* In recent years, she has been a frequent guest in Europe, giving readings, participating in conferences, and delivering keynote lectures at prestigious events, such as the Schelling Lecture in Munich, the Freud Lecture in Vienna, and the Kierkegaard Lecture in Copenhagen. In addition to her literary production, she has continuously published essays and papers in academic and scientific journals, including *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, *Seizure: the European Journal of Epilepsy*, *Neuropsychoanalysis*, and *Clinical Neurophysiology.* She also received major prizes, such as the Gabarron International Award for Thought and Humanities 2012, which was conferred on her "for her tireless investigative work that has allowed her to integrate with a single voice highly original ideas of philosophy, neuroscience, psychology or psychoanalysis in her literary, creative and documentary work. The Jury has also wanted to underscore her contribution to the understanding and discovery of Fine Arts, through her many essays and articles."[2]

Hustvedt's literary works include the novels *The Blindfold* (1992), *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* (1996), *What I Loved* (2003), *The Sorrows of an American* (2008), *The Summer without Men* (2011), and *The Blazing World* (2014). Her autobiographical analysis of her illness in *The Shaking Woman, or, A History of My Nerves* (2010) has drawn attention from different fields and has helped to revitalize interdisciplinary scholarly interest in the connections between literary life writing and the life sciences.[3] She has published a collection of poems, *Reading to You* (1981), and the essay collections *Yonder* (1998), *Mysteries of the Rectangle: Essays on Painting* (2005), *A Plea for Eros* (2006), and *Living, Thinking, Looking* (2012).

2 The Gabarron. 2012. Press Release October 29. <http://gabarron.org/Awards/Awards/Awards2012/Winners/ThoughtandHumanities/PressRelease/tabid/1738/Default.aspx> [accessed 15 March 2015].

3 See the newly instituted graduate training college *Life Sciences / Life Writing* at Mainz University, in which Hustvedt serves as cooperating external expert.

The roles of writer and scholar can in fact not be clearly separated in her work, since she includes a wide range of scientific material from various disciplines in her narratives, not only in her neurological memoir *The Shaking Woman* but in novels like *What I Loved, The Sorrows of an American*, or *The Blazing World* as well. By integrating scientific knowledge with highly personal stories, her texts combine rational analysis with psycho-emotional energy as the two vital sources of human creativity which have been identified both by traditional literary theory and by contemporary neuroscience.

This volume approaches Hustvedt's work from a range of perspectives in order to engage with an oeuvre that is hallmarked by a wide variety of styles, themes, forms of narration, and aesthetic features. The overarching themes of the essays crystallized the categories that organize the volume: "Literary Creation and Communication," "Psychoanalysis and Philosophy," "Medicine and Narrative," "Vision, Perception, and Power," and "Trauma, Memory, and the Ambiguities of Self." The collection opens with an essay by Siri Hustvedt herself on the creation of imaginative texts and closes with an interview with the author by Susanne Becker, in which Hustvedt elucidates her personal conception of the processes of writing and reading literary texts – processes that for Hustvedt are intricately intertwined.

The first part of the collection, "Literary Creation and Communication," examines how communication through and in the form of fictional and non-fictional literature can take place. The section opens with *Siri Hustvedt*'s essay "Why One Story and Not Another," in which she illuminates concepts of creativity involving the individual's body and mind. She points out how her artistic freedom as an author of fiction is nevertheless always guided by the intrinsic imperatives of what "feel[s]" like "fictional truth." Imaginative storytelling evolves not from arbitrary invention but from a complex interplay between conscious and unconscious factors that produces a distinctive form of knowledge including not only the intellectual and reflexive dimensions but emotionality, memory, imagination, and the embodied existence of every human being in the creative process. Hustvedt's essay is followed by *Gabriele Rippl*'s contribution, "The Rich Zones of Genre Borderlands: Siri Hustvedt's Art of Mingling," which explores how the prevalent theme of "mixing" can be utilized for an analysis of the novel's aesthetics in which confining genre conventions are constantly transcended. Rippl calls this phenomenon "genre hybridization" and traces it in Hustvedt's three most recent novels. *Diana Tappen-Scheuermann* approaches Hustvedt's fiction through the lens of reader-response theory. Her contribution, "Reality Bites: Fractured Narrative and the Author-Reader Interaction in Siri Hustvedt's Work," especially focuses on and compares the autobiographical/autofictional dimensions in both the memoir *The Shaking Woman* and the novel

What I Loved. *Caroline Rosenthal*'s article "'A carnival in hell': Representations of New York City in Siri Hustvedt's Novels" looks at the representation of New York in *The Blindfold* and *What I Loved*. Rosenthal conceptualizes New York as a metropolis that is central to the "cultural imaginary of the nation" (51) and a setting which is intricately related to the development of both themes and characters of Hustvedt's fiction, claiming that "Hustvedt not only uses the space of New York to render repressed and hidden aspects in her figures' psyche, [...] but demonstrates how bodies are informed by spatiality." (52) As the last contribution within this section, *Alfred Hornung*'s essay "*The Shaking Woman* in the Media: Life Writing and Neuroscience" analyzes how the public discourse and discussion of Hustvedt's memoir and the described migraines differ in various TV and interview formats in Europe and the US and thus reads Hustvedt's books as interacting with the wider public and media landscapes.

Part II, "Psychoanalysis and Philosophy," opens with contributions by the French psychoanalysts *Lucien Mélèse* ("~~The~~ No Truth about Siri") and *Françoise Davoine* ("Siri's Timequakes"), who in very different ways trace the impact Hustvedt's fiction has had on their work in the field of psychoanalysis but also their personal lives. Mélèse explores the transitional space between author and reader by sharing excerpts from his correspondence with Hustvedt and connecting the novels with personal associations and fragments of his own life experience. Davoine interweaves reflections on *The Sorrows of an American* with a rich tapestry of psychoanalytic theory, drawing on her own experience as well as works linked to trauma. In the next chapter, "The Self Is a Moving Target: The Neuroscience of Siri Hustvedt's Artists," *Jason Tougaw* traces the intersubjective forces at work in visual representation from within a neuroscientific framework. In his essay, he connects the author's use of ekphrasis, which he reads as "contiguous with forms of 'self representation' our brains engage in" (113), to ideas developed by neuroscientists such as Jaak Panksepp and António Damásio. Tougaw pursues the "moving targets" of Hustvedt's ideas on self-representation and identity by examining the portrait artists who populate Hustvedt's novels. *Klaus Lösch and Heike Paul* analyze Hustvedt's writings from the angle of the "tacit knowledge" that forms an implicit but nevertheless influential dimension in the lives and psychology of Hustvedt's characters. As the authors point out, "[t]he tacit may bring forth pathologies, trigger extreme physical responses, store negative experiences, affirm dominant ideologies, and stabilize symbolic and social order; at the same time, it may also be the origin/touchstone of protest and resistance" (149). In *Mark C. Taylor*'s "Wounding Words" the impact of Søren Kierkegaard's works is the focus of attention, especially concerning questions of authorship (e. g. the choice of narrative voice or the use of pseudonyms) and the influence of psychoanalytic, especially Freudian, concepts. In this way Taylor es-

tablishes connections that are prevalent in Hustvedt's *The Sorrows of an American* and *The Blazing World*.

In Part III, "Medicine and Narrative," the theme of illness and its literary representation and discussion in Hustvedt's oeuvre stand at the foreground. *Rita Charon*, Director of the Program in Narrative Medicine at Columbia University, begins this section by sharing her impressions from Hustvedt's previous visits to the program to teach literature to health care practitioners and her participation in the Narrative Medicine Rounds. Charon views Hustvedt's literary endeavors as "surgeries," "live-saving interventions" that "had opened a clearing for others who shared her brand of uncertainty, others who had experienced symptoms on those borderlands between things" (189). *Carmen Birkle*, in "'No self is an island': Doctor-Patient Relationships in Siri Hustvedt's Work," examines fictional representations of doctor-patient relationships, claiming that "representing these encounters in narrative offers insights into Hustvedt's perception of the medical profession and, at the same time, allows her to situate herself and her illness within the medical discourse as a form of therapy" (194). Also from the perspective of literary studies, *Britta Bein* looks at the phenomenon of "Mysterious Illness and the Acceptance of Ambiguity in *The Blindfold* and *The Summer without Men*." Bein conceives of illnesses as crises that – in analogy to literature – allow for forms of reading and interpretation that can serve as "possible strategies to cope with 'mysterious illnesses'" (227). From a medical perspective, *Petra Gelhaus* in her article "In Search of a Diagnosis: Siri Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman*," follows the author on her journey toward an understanding of the mysterious illness that took possession of her body. Gelhaus takes the occasion to reflect on the mind-body problem and the interplay of subjective and objective forces in medical knowledge. *Susanne Rohr* in her contribution "'The image makers': Reality Constitution and the Role of Autism in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blazing World*" analyzes Hustvedt's latest novel as a prime example of the role of art and fiction in constructing reality, and zooms in on the special question of symptoms of autism in one of the characters, Harriet's son Ethan. Rohr claims that by giving a narrative voice to an autistic person, "Hustvedt effectively explores this intersubjective process by installing a narrative self as a curious narrative center within the polyphony of voices that constitute the novel that is unable – or has difficulty – in doing just that: entering into a dialogue with others" (249).

Part IV of the collection explores the dimension of "Vision, Perception, and Power" in Hustvedt's oeuvre. *Carla Schulz-Hoffmann*'s "'What fascinate me are the journeys that begin with looking and only looking': Siri Hustvedt's Visual Imagination" approaches Hustvedt's works from her perspective as an art historian. Examining the role of visual art in both Hustvedt's fictional works – *The*

Blindfold and *What I Loved* – and in her essay collection *Mysteries of the Rectangle*, Schulz-Hoffmann develops a concept of the aesthetic experience of visual art that is centrally hallmarked by intersubjectivity and the potential for narrativity. *Astrid Böger* in "'I look and sometimes I see': The Art of Perception in Siri Hustvedt's Novels" explores the "complex relationship between looking and seeing, remembering and feeling" (281), also including Hustvedt's latest essay collection *Living, Thinking, Looking* in her analysis. Following the author's representations of artistic production and reception from *The Blindfold* to *The Blazing World*, Böger notes "a marked shift toward a more interactive, dialogical process of meaning making via art" (281). In "'Openings that can't be closed': Patterns of Surveillance Culture in Siri Hustvedt's Novels," *Birgit Däwes* employs strategies of surveillance in Velázquez's paintings *La Venus del Espejo*, (or *Rokeby Venus*) in order to analyze "questions of seeing and visual representation, and particularly the connections between observation and power" in *The Blindfold*, *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, *The Sorrows of an American*, and *The Blazing World* – novels that "remind us that this 'knowledge' is not inherent in the structures of seeing: on the contrary, we require techniques of decoding, analyzing, and contextualizing information – in short, of interpretation – in order to make meaning" (307). *Anna Thiemann*'s article "Portraits of the (Post-)Feminist Artist: Female Authorship and Authority in Siri Hustvedt's Fiction" constitutes the final essay within this part of the collection. Focusing on "female creativity and identity," she argues that "Hustvedt['s] preoccupation with the figure of the woman artist reflects her strong interest in broader social and political issues like the construction of gender roles and the current state of the women's movement. Her novels evoke and contest established images of female authorship which have served strategic functions in feminist theory and criticism" (312).

Part V concentrates on "Trauma, Memory, and the Ambiguities of Self." This part opens with a contribution by *Jean-Michel Rabaté*, "History and Trauma in *The Sorrows of an American*," describing the historical dimensions of trauma in this novel of loss, mourning, and psychological survival. His essay is followed by *Katharina Donn*'s investigation of structural dimensions of trauma in *The Sorrows of an American*, which she interprets as indicative of a "crisis of knowledge." Donn outlines a literary epistemology of trauma in terms of the material metaphors which pattern this text and highlights the possibility of knowledge in the aftermath of shock and collapse. *Katja Sarkowsky* in "'The wounded psyche is not a broken leg': Illness, Injury, and Writing the Self in Siri Hustvedt's Work" examines the implications of illness and impairment for the narrative construction of self. As she notes, it is "no accident that there is no sense of 'healing' in Hustvedt's fictional and non-fictional work" as "[i]llness, mental and/or physical impairment, in this context most pronouncedly serve to explore the porosity and

fragility, but also the necessity of a boundary between self and other" (359). *Christopher Schliephake*'s essay "Embodied Memories, Embodied Meanings: Mind, Matter, and Place in the Works of Siri Hustvedt" analyzes *The Shaking Woman* and *The Sorrows of an American* as exemplifying that "the process of meaning-making in her work – both of the past and of oneself – follows a dialogical principle, combining a take on the past that is embodied and an encounter between the self and the (non-)human world" (374). To delve into the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of memory and narrative in Hustvedt's work, he frames his interpretation with contemporary theories of body memory. In her contribution "'We have different selves over the course of a life, but even all at once': The Multiple Self and Cultural Multiple Personality in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blazing World*," *Heike Schwarz* bases her analysis of *The Blazing World* on the existence of multiple selves and multiple cultural personalities, claiming that Hustvedt's "fiction negotiates variations of approaches to self-concepts of literary characters and the narrative structure itself, so that especially the multi-voiced *The Blazing World* can be marked as clever variation of the multiple personality genre and its subgenres" (390).

The collection closes with a conversation between *Susanne Becker* and *Siri Hustvedt* entitled "Deceiving the reader into the truth," in which they discuss Hustvedt's important themes that have shaped her work and their development in her most recent novel, *The Blazing World*. Their conversation offers insights into Hustvedt's current views of art and literature, with special emphasis on questions of authorship, the aesthetic experience, artistic ambition, and truth in fiction, which reconnect to the preceding sections as well as to the opening essay of this collection. Together, these contributions reflect the various "zones of focused ambiguity" – a term Hustvedt coins in her essay "Borderlands: First, Second, and Third Person Adventures in Crossing Disciplines" – that the author continues to develop in her fictional and non-fictional works.[4] In Hustvedt's *Living, Thinking, Looking*, the term "zone" frequently points toward an intermediate and liminal space, as in a "zone between waking and sleeping" (42), "a middle zone between the bodily senses and intellect" (175), or a "zone between people" (196).[5] Derived from the Greek term for 'girdle,' the word 'zone' traditionally has the connotation of a space safely distinguished from adjacent regions, "comprised between definite limits" (*OED*), circumscribed, separated. Yet Hustvedt's use of 'zone' always carries within it a presence of what lies be-

4 Siri Hustvedt. 2013. "Borderlands: First, Second, and Third Person Adventures in Crossing Disciplines." In: Alfred Hornung (ed.). *American Lives*. Heidelberg: Winter. 111 – 134.

5 Siri Hustvedt. 2012. *Living, Thinking, Looking*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

yond, its existence often defined by its betweenness and the blurring of boundaries. In this spirit, the essays collected here seek to follow Hustvedt's aesthetics of zoning, embracing ambiguity rather than strict categorization to bring into resonance a polyphony of "plural voices and multiple visions"[6] that intersect, overlap, and transgress boundaries.

We would like to thank the contributors to the volume for their collaboration and support. We also thank the publisher De Gruyter, especially Katja Lehming and Ulrike Krauß, for their helpful and competent cooperation, and the editors of the *Anglia Book Series* for including the volume in the series. Our special thanks are due to Beate Greisel for her careful and reliable help in proofreading and in preparing the manuscript for print.

6 The title of I. V. Hess's book on Søren Kierkegaard, M. M. Bakhtin, and German art historian Aby Warburg in *The Blazing World*.

Literary Creation and Communication

Siri Hustvedt

Why One Story and Not Another?

Why one story and not another? For the fiction writer, any and all stories are possible. Theoretically, there are no restrictions. If I wish to write a story about a child who grows wings and a tail at age thirteen and flies into another world, no one will stop me. I am entirely free, but that is not my question. Why does a story feel right or wrong while I am making it? How do I know that a character must smash another character over the head at this juncture in the narrative? And conversely, why do I know that the paragraph I have just written is false and must be erased and redone? I am not talking about changing sentences to make them more elegant or cutting out a paragraph after reading a text because I realize the story can do without it. Such alterations belong to editing, and, usually, I can explain my decisions. I am asking where fictional stories originate and what guides their creation? Why, as a reader, do some novels feel to me like lies and others feel true? When I read, what do I bring to the text? Are there times when I am simply unable to see what is there? I think these are significant questions that are seldom asked. There is, however, a related question, one universally maligned and ridiculed by writers around the world, a question that dogs every novelist at countless events because someone out there in the audience inevitably asks it. But the dreaded question, regarded as the province of morons, is actually profound. The question is: Where do you get your ideas?

The word "idea" catapults us instantly into philosophy. What does it mean to have an idea? What is an idea? For Plato ideal forms were more real than our world of flux and perceptual sensation. For Plutarch an idea was by its very nature bodiless. Descartes posited thought as the only verifiable aspect of human existence and separated body and mind. Contemporary philosophers and scientists are busily doing their best to smash the Cartesian divide between spirit and matter, but what is the relation between our ideas or thoughts and our feeling, sensing bodies? Where do ideas come from? The mind-body question appears as soon as the person in the back of the room asks me or any other writer on tour where our ideas come from. Are ideas in brain tissue? I have discovered that even when presented in highly lucid language, readers have difficulty grasping the problem. In my book *The Shaking Woman, or, A History of My Nerves* I pose the question again and again from multiple perspectives, and yet I was amazed to find that in interviews about the book, my interlocutors ignored it entirely (Hustvedt 2010). I will try to articulate the problem yet again. As a culture we are so deeply inculcated with the idea that mental faculties – thoughts, ideas, memories, fantasies, and feelings – are different in kind from physical faculties –

walking, running, having stomach aches, farting – that bridging the divide makes little sense to most people, and rather than think about it, they avoid it altogether.

The problem of dualism, that we are two things, intellect and body, not one, was articulated beautifully in 1664 by the natural philosopher Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, whose radical works were either ignored or ridiculed in her own time because she was a woman: "I would ask those that say the brain has neither sense, reason nor self-motion; but that all proceeds from an Immaterial Principle [...] distinct from the body [...] where their Immaterial Ideas reside, in what part or place in the body?" (Cavendish 1664: 185 – 186). Cavendish's question remains urgent.

Indeed, we all know that a head injury or dementia can make us forget who we are, can change our personalities, our ideas and thoughts. We know that the psychological and the physiological are not unrelated. And yet, how the private inner subjective experience of ideas, thoughts, and memories is connected to the objective outer reality of brain anatomy, neuronal connections, neurochemicals, and hormones remains unanswered. There is no agreed-upon theoretical model for brain-mind function. There are huge amounts of empirical data, and there is a lot of theoretical speculation and guesswork. Some ideas strike me as better than others, but that does not mean we have figured it out. The next time you pick up a newspaper and read about the neural correlates or neural underpinnings or neural representations of fear, joy, sex or anything else under the sun, you can say to yourself, Ah, the words "correlates," "underpinnings," and "representation" are used because the scientists and philosophers are reluctant to say that those brain systems *are* fear, joy, sex or anything else under the sun. The words expose the gap between mind and body rather than close it.

I cannot solve the division for you, but I can say there is a strong return to the body in many disciplines. Some cognitive scientists are abandoning the metaphor that has held sway since the sixties; that our brains are like computers, information processors. The brain is a moist organ inside a body, and the computational metaphor fails to cover many aspects of brain-mind function, our bodily movement, something as simple as how we walk, for example, as well as our emotions and feelings. The writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the French phenomenologist, who emphasized embodiment, has seen a resurgence both in the sciences and the humanities. From this point of view: "Where do you get your ideas?" must involve an embodied self or being. Ideas, too, are embodied.

So how can we think about where the ideas for stories come from? How do we frame the question? It is common to point to writers' biographies, if even a remote connection between writer and novel can be found. Many writers have robbed their own lives, and the lives of their families and friends for material.

Writers frequently place their stories in real places. I have moved between New York City and Minnesota, the Midwestern state where I grew up. The city and my hometown are intimate spaces for me, and when I write, I imagine my characters moving down a familiar street or looking at a cornfield I remember from childhood. I call up known places in my mind and insert my characters into them. Just as conscious autobiographical memory needs a space and ground, loci, the characters in a work of fiction do not float in an empty world. As Mikel Dufrenne points out in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, "the represented world [of the book] also possesses, in its own fashion, the spatiotemporal structure of the perceived world. Space and time here fulfill a dual function. They serve to open up a world and to ordain it objectively by creating a world common to the characters and the readers" (Dufrenne 1973: 171). Writing partakes of this shared spatiotemporal reality as well, even if the story takes place on another planet – some form of recognition must be present.

The art of fiction cannot be reduced to a writer's autobiography. And the geography of fictions, whether real or invented, is the setting for events. And yet, stories must come from somewhere, and they must in one way or another relate to their authors, to their perceptions of the world and their experiences of it. A writer's imagination is not impersonal, is it? And it is somehow connected to memory, isn't it? Homer's *Odyssey* begins with a call to the muse Mnemosyne: "Speak, Memory."

The link between memory and the imagination is very old. The Latin imago for image or picture lies inside the word itself – imagination. In Western philosophy imagination has traditionally referred to the images in our minds that are not immediate perceptions – the mental pictures we carry in our heads. Aristotle insisted on the pictorial character of imagination and that it, unlike direct perception, could be false. He located imagination and memory in the same part of the soul, an idea echoed by Aquinas, which then appeared in various forms for centuries. For Descartes, a dualist, the imagination, *fantasie*, was a middle ground between the bodily senses and the intellect. In *Leviathan* (1651) Hobbes wrote "[...] imagination and memory are but one thing, which for divers considerations has divers names" (Hobbes 2012: 16). Hobbes, a materialist, did not think that thought floated above bodies. Thought was of the body, as it was for Cavendish. Cavendish knew both Hobbes and Descartes, but they refused to engage her directly because she had the wrong body for a philosopher. Her thought differed from Hobbes, but she too was a materialist and proposed a continuum of thought, from reason to fancy, from the conceptual to the imaginative. For Spinoza the lowest level of knowledge was imagination, and it contained memory within it. In *The New Science* (1725), Vico, the philosopher and historian, also regarded *memoria*, *fantasia*, and *ignegno* (invention) as parts of the same

mental function, which emerged from the body. Hegel understood consciousness, with its ability to bring the past into the present in memory, as an act of the imagination.

Although parsed in various ways by many thinkers, my point here is broad. Memory and imagination have repeatedly been connected or combined in philosophy, and this makes sense when you think of mental imagery. What are those pictures we have in our heads? I can call forth an image of you at dinner last night or a visual memory of the house where I grew up. But I also have a picture of a character in my most recent novel – I see Harriet Burden working on a sculpture in her studio in Red Hook, Brooklyn. The first two images are from life, the last is from a work of fiction, but I do not think they are *qualitatively* different. In her remarkable book *The Art of Memory*, Frances Yates discusses *Ad Herrenium*, a book written by a scholar for his rhetoric students in 86 – 82 BC. Yates explains that the practitioner of artificial memory who wishes to remember a speech, moved through a real remembered architecture and sequentially populated the rooms with vivid emotionally potent images, usually human – beautiful, comic, grotesque, or obscene – which helped him remember the words, because, the ancient author points out, "[t]he things we easily remember when they are real we likewise remember when they are figments." Further, he writes, "[f]or the places are very much like wax tablets or papyrus, the images like the letters, the arrangement and disposition of the images like the script and the delivery is like the reading" (qtd. in Yates 1966: 26). The rhetorician uses mental images of places, which he populates with imaginary figures to remember his text.

Artificial memory is a conscious use of our imaginative abilities. Natural memory is also mutable and frequently fictive. We do not retrieve memories from a fixed storehouse in the mind. Our brains are, in fact, not computers that contain intact memories, as in Random-Access Memory. Long before neuroscience came to the conclusion that memory is constructive not reproductive, thinkers such as Wilhelm Wundt, William James, Sigmund Freud, and others argued against the notion of static preserved memories that can be retrieved on demand. Without being conscious of it, our autobiographical, or as scientists often call them, episodic memories are continually altered and recreated by the present in a process called reconsolidation. We do not recall an original memory but rather the last time we took it out for examination.

There is a lot of research on false memory, memory distortion, mis-recognition, and how one event often collapses into another to create a form of hybrid recollection. The same brain systems appear to be activated in both remembering and imagining. Recollecting oneself in the past and casting oneself as a character in the future belong to the same psychobiological processes. People who suffer memory loss from brain damage to the hippocampus are also poor at imag-

ining detailed fictional scenarios. The scientists Daniel Schacter and Donna Rose Addis argue that our flawed, constructive, memory systems are actually adaptive because they are flexible rather than static and used to predict and anticipate what will happen to us through what has already happened to us. They write: "Thus a memory system that simply stored rote records of what happened in the past would not be well suited to simulating future events, which will probably share some similarities with past events while differing in other respects" (Shacter and Addis 2007: 207/776). Imagining oneself in the future is creating a personal fiction, a narrative of *what it might be like...*, which is a close relative to *what if...*, *I hope...*, and *I dread...* .

The writing of fiction clearly partakes of this geography of the potential, the land of play, daydreams, fantasy, and reverie, of wishes and fears. The activity that the psychologist Endel Tulving called time travel, locating the self in the past and imagining it in the future, is a function of reflective self-consciousness, the ability to represent and imagine one's self as another person. There is growing evidence that human beings aren't alone in this – dolphins, elephants, some primates, and birds can recognize themselves in the mirror and learn some forms of language, but our sophisticated linguistic capacities allow for a flowering of artistic and intellectual imaginative play that can't be found among other animals. Nevertheless, physiologically we have much in common with our rat cousins who are alive, alert and aware of their surroundings, who play and mate, and negotiate their environments through learning and memory. It would be interesting to know what mental imagery rats have. I suspect that they do not call up pictures in their minds of a great meal last Sunday or fantasize about one a week from now. And I can say with some confidence that my dog Jack, now dead, who spent many hours in a state of canine torpor, never once had an idea for a novel.

Sometimes a book begins with a feeling. My first novel *The Blindfold* was generated from an uncanny sensation I had felt during and after an encounter with a man who wanted me to write pornography for him. *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* began with a true story I was told in my hometown about the twin brother of someone I knew. The twin walked into a café, ordered breakfast, ate it, took out a gun and blew his brains out in front of his fellow diners. It was a scene that haunted me. I saw it in my mind over and over. My novel *What I Loved* began with the cinematic mental image of a door opening onto a room. Inside the room was an obese woman lying on a bed, dead. *The Sorrows of an American* began with a recurring image of a girl sitting up in her coffin. The coffin was lying on a table in my grandparents' living room. *The Summer without Men* began with a sentence: "Sometime after he said the word pause, I went mad

and landed in the hospital" (Hustvedt 2011a: 1). I found the sentence at once dark and funny and went on to write a comedy.

These anecdotes about beginnings, however, tell us only about consciousness, not unconsciousness. Why that sensation? Why that story about the twins, why those images, and why that sentence? Only the first is autobiographical in any genuine sense, and what I wanted to reproduce was not the incident but the feeling I had had. The twin's suicide was a dramatic story that stuck with me. The mental images seemed to come from nowhere, as did the sentence. This is why writers roll their eyes at the question: Where do you get your ideas? It is because it seems unanswerable. And yet, there are clearly unconscious processes that precede the idea, that are at work before it becomes conscious, work that is done subliminally in a way similar to both remembering and dreaming. Sometimes long after I have finished a book, I realize that I have snatched the voice of one person I know, taken the hairdo of another, and the vulnerability of a third to combine them in a single character. That mingling, however, like the condensations in dreams, had taken place without my knowing it.

I daydream about my characters. I listen to them talk before I go to sleep. When I'm stuck in a book, my effort to discover what should happen in the narrative is very much like trying to remember something that actually happened to me, but which I can't bring to light. I never feel there are a hundred possibilities. I feel there is one true event that must happen, and it must be recalled correctly and put into the book. The right solution is purely a matter of my feeling. It feels right, and I go from there. Once my characters have been born, they direct me. I have sometimes wanted to force them into situations, and they adamantly refuse. This has made me wonder about the connection between novel writing and what used to be called multiple personality disorder, now dissociative identity disorder. Obviously, the two phenomena are not the same. However real my characters may become to me as other selves, I am aware they are my creatures.

In "Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car," Virginia Woolf writes about the spectacle through the window, the colors and forms of the gloaming landscape. She feels the beauty, and she resists it. In a parenthesis, she writes, "[i]t is well known how in circumstances like these the self splits up and one self is eager and dissatisfied and the other stern and philosophical." More selves appear, but at the very end of the essay, she writes, "[o]ff with you, I said to my assembled selves. Your work is done. I dismiss you" (Woolf 1970: 9). The novelist may well have multiple selves, but usually they retire on demand.

Robert Louis Stevenson, a writer who dreamed the doubles "Jekyll and Hyde" and attended closely to the nighttime visits of his brownies, the little people who danced about in the theater of his head, for inspiration, asked the question I posed earlier. Why do some passages, some stories, some books feel

wrong? "The trouble with 'Ollala'," he wrote to a friend, "is that it somehow sounds false [...] and I don't know why [...] I admire the style of it myself, more than is perhaps good for me; it is so solidly written. And that brings back (almost with the voice of despair) my unanswerable: Why is it false?" (qtd. in Balfour 1911: 19). I cannot answer for Stevenson. I can say that any number of well-written books feel false to me, that falseness has nothing to do with either good sentences or subject matter. Kafka's Gregor Samsa waking up as an insect and the terrible loneliness of Mary Shelley's monster are just as true as Tolstoy's evocation of Anna Karenina's ostracism or the grief of Wharton's Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, for whom the links in her bracelet have come to seem "like manacles chaining her to her fate" (Wharton 1911: 10).

Truth, that is, the kind of truth Stevenson refers to, is located elsewhere. I have written about this kind of fictional truth in an essay that was originally published in the journal *Neuropsychoanalysis* under the title "Three Emotional Stories: Reflections on Memory, the Imagination, Narrative, and the Self." It is republished in my collection of essays, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, without the subtitle, abstract, key words, and peer reviews. In the last line of the lopped off abstract, I write:

> Culling insights from Freud and research in neuroscience and phenomenology, I argue that a core bodily, affective, timeless self is the ground of the narrative, temporal self of autobiographical memory and of fiction and that the secret to creativity lies not in the so-called higher cognitive processes but in the dreamlike reconfigurations of emotional meanings that take place unconsciously. (Hustvedt 2011b: 187)

What does this mean? I cannot reproduce this tightly argued essay here, but I can say that I am interested in what happens underground, before an idea or picture or sentence surfaces. It is now a commonplace to say that most of what the brain does is unconscious, or non-conscious for those who want to avoid sounding Freudian. There are many debates about the exact nature of this subliminal reality, but no one is claiming any longer that it does not exist. Although much of a story may be created unconsciously, the writer's recognition that a story is right is consciously felt. Feelings are by their very nature conscious and serve as guides for our behavior, even when we have no idea why we have the feelings we have. I also stressed that it is important to remember that emotions can never be *unreal* even when they are triggered by fictions.

I used the Russian Formalist term *fabula* in "Three Emotional Stories" to describe what a writer draws upon for a book. The difference between the *fabula* and the *sujet* can be described simply as the difference between *what happens* in a story and *how it is told*. The Cinderella *fabula* is always the same; its *sujet*, on the other hand, has taken myriad forms. The *fabula* of a story feels

to me as if it is already there in me, not yet known, but glimpsed as a kind of dream-like memory, part of the subliminal self, a thing that must either be dredged to the surface or unleashed in a great rush. The *sujet*, on the other hand, is often up for grabs. How to tell it? Who should tell it? These are often fully conscious decisions. And yet, it happens that parts of books or poems or entire works are written in trances. The underground pushes upward and appears fully formed to become Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" or Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In his classic work on creativity (1952) that collects the accounts of many brilliant thinkers and artists, Brewster Ghiselin writes in his preface, "[p]roduction by a process of purely conscious calculation seems never to occur [...] automatism is reported by nearly every worker who has much to say about his processes, and no process has been demonstrated to be wholly free from it" (Ghiselin 1954: 15–16).

Countless writers, as well as mathematicians and physicists, have described sudden revelations that came to them in dreams, dream states, or in sudden rushes of inspiration. I have experienced periods of more or less automatic writing in my own work when a book appears to compose itself. It is exciting, and it only occurs in states of physical relaxation and mental openness to whatever comes along. It is a permissive, fearless state, in which one gains access to "stuff" one didn't know was there. The psychoanalyst Ernst Kris, who was interested in the making of art, understood this state as a powerful release of passion while the artist remained under the protection of "the aesthetic illusion" – words that suggest explosive creativity without ego disintegration (Kris 1952). The protection of the aesthetic illusion is no doubt also a way to articulate the vital barrier between the artist's multiple selves and the alters of a traumatized, dissociated patient.

The sudden release of a solution, formula, poem, or part of a novel from subliminal regions of a person, however, is dependent on what is *down there* (to use a metaphor suited to the subterranean), and the bulk of that material, I am convinced, is not produced by an *essential*, fixed self, nor does it come from some elusive quality of "genius." It is the accumulation of years of reading and thinking and living and feeling. It is the result of autobiography in the loosest sense – not as literal facts, but as the creation of a story that appears from a writer's depths and feels emotionally true to her. The story of Mary Shelley's monster expressed her own deep reality. In her preface to the novel she writes that the story poured out of her as in a waking dream. The lonely, vengeful monster is a product of her own emotional complexity, but it is also, and this is essential, the product of her reading of and love for John Milton.

Every good novel is written because it has to be written. The need to tell is compelling, and it is always directed at another, not a real other but an imagined

other person. (In my case, the fantasy person is someone who gets all my jokes, references, puns, and has read every single book I have read. I have come to understand that, despite my great longing for this stranger, she or he does not exist.) Nevertheless, every work of fiction inhabits the realm of both "I" and "you" – on what I call the axis of discourse or in the between zone. Even journals and diaries are written at the very least for another self, perhaps the one who returns to the entries years later and is surprised.

That between zone is established long before we learn language in the back and forth gestural, musical, and tactile exchanges between our infant selves and, usually, our mothers. There is even a term used by scientists for the language people use to answer babies – *motherese* – which is not, of course, limited to mothers. This proto-conversation is, however, crucial to human sensory-motor-emotional-cognitive development. Through these early social interactions in combination with genetic temperament, a brain matures and a personality emerges. The rhythms of this back and forth dialogue create expectations in us about the responses of others to us, which undergird who we are and who we are still becoming, despite our total amnesia for that time of life. In *Philosophy in a New Key*, Susanne Langer writes, "there are certain aspects of so-called inner life – physical or mental – which have formal properties similar to those of music – patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, or agreement and disagreement, proportion, fulfillment, sudden change, etc." (Langer 1979: 228). Langer's description of these aspects of inner life beautifully encapsulates the pulsing realities of narrative art. Meanings in a novel are not limited to dictionary definitions. They are also found in the muscular, sensory, emotional realities of the human body. And it is from these that we recognize the rights and wrongs of fiction. I know when I have hit the right story for myself, when there is no longer any need to change what I have done because the truth of the page is answered by a gut feeling inside me, which I rely upon absolutely.

The relatively new field of epigenetics is illustrative of the inside-outside drama that is part of how a human being becomes herself; our genes are mostly expressed through the environment, and studying that interaction, the two parts of which are not separable, but belong to a single process, is a way to better understand what the human organism is. No one becomes herself in isolation. We are beings embedded in a world. What we learn and master, whether it's riding a bike or reading or running complex machinery or how to solve an equation, the process swiftly becomes unconscious and automatic. We are creatures of perceptual habits and patterns and pay little attention when the world goes along as we expect it to. Those unconscious habits of mind include judgments, prejudices, beliefs, and ideas. There are hundreds of empirical studies on this subject. The

unconscious is neither primitive nor unsophisticated; it is a repository of what is so deeply known we don't have to be conscious of it anymore.

Although novels may grow out of this vast underworld, when the book is finished, it is nothing but words. "Art," Susanne Langer wrote, "is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling" (Langer 1953: 40). When you open a book, what you find inside it is only print. The joys and sorrows of the book's creator, her biography, her personal experiences of emotional truths, her rhythmic sense are there only in so far as they are *represented* by those little black letters on the page. The writer is not there. Her body is absent. And representation, by its very nature, is estranged from what is being represented. In speech and writing we alienate ourselves from ourselves even when we say "I" to indicate the self as speaker.

The reader animates a novel. Without a reader, the words lie inert on the page. The reader *feels* a work's meanings in his body, in the tension of his muscles as a scene develops toward crisis or, in their relaxation, when the same scene dissipates, and the character has survived. The reader brings his own memories, his mental pictures, with their peculiar architecture and landscapes to his reading. He brings his thoughts, as well as prejudices, limitations, and particular emotional tone to the text. Together reader and book form a collaboration of meanings, which have no objective reality, but create yet another between zone, an intersubjective exchange, which sometimes succeeds and sometimes fails. I recall stifling my fury when a well-known novelist sitting across from me at a dinner uttered these words: "Well, everyone knows Dostoyevsky is just no damn good." Recollecting myself in tranquility, I realized that Dostoyevsky is probably not for everyone, even though a part of me thinks his work should be universal. I also realized that this particular writer was so enamored of Nabokov that he had probably adopted his hero's literary views, which, in my opinion, were often egregious.

Such differences are usually understood as a matter of taste. A book that tastes good to you doesn't have the same flavor for me. Literature is not science; there are no experiments that can be run again and again to see if one gets the same results. Books are regularly pronounced good or bad in the newspapers, and this is why, with a couple of exceptions, I have stayed away from reviewing books. Even at its best, it is a superficial form and often inspires pettiness and easy cruelty. I fear my own prejudices as well, my own possible blindness to a great work of art. André Gide is famously credited with rejecting Proust, but Proust's housekeeper, Céleste Albaret, claimed that she and Proust suspected that Gide may never have even opened the manuscript (Albaret 2003: 183). This may be the worst literary mistake, not bothering to read a book because of some vague prejudice, which, like so much in our lives, is often unconscious.

We all have them, I'm afraid: "You mean that giggling girl over there with the low cut sweater and the beautiful breasts is doing her second post-doc at Rockefeller?"

Prejudices against women writers run deep, and yet, all novelists, male and female, are read by women far more than by men. My friend, Ian McKuen, once said, "[w]hen women stop reading, the novel will be dead" (McKuen 2005). I quote the ironic narrator of my novel, *The Summer without Men*, Mia Fredricksen, who has been making jokes about genitals and sexual difference throughout her tale:

> Lots of women read fiction. Most men don't. If a man opens a novel, he likes to have a masculine name on the cover; it's reassuring somehow. You never know what might happen to that external genitalia if you immerse yourself in imaginary doings concocted by someone with the goods on the inside. Moreover, men like to boast about their neglect of fiction: "I don't read fiction, but my wife does." (Hustvedt 2011a: 145–146)

In my experience, the line that follows, "I don't read fiction but my wife does," is: "Would you sign the book to her?" In other words, a novel can taste bad before it is eaten simply because it has been written by a woman. Of course I often wonder what those men are doing at my reading in the first place. Why didn't your wife come? When I published my first novel, an interviewer in Germany praised my text. He said it was brilliant and then added he did not believe I had written it. It was clearly the work of my husband. A young man, a writer himself, once said to me, "you know, you write like a man." He was not referring to the books I had written in the voice of a man, but to all of my work, and this statement was intended as a high compliment. Women are not immune to this prejudice either. A young woman once approached me at an art opening to say, "I never read books by women, but a friend of mine insisted I try one of yours, and I loved it!" I did not feel particularly grateful. A literary editor in New York, Chris Jackson, admitted rather sheepishly last year in a blog that he could not remember the last time he had read a novel by a woman (cf. Jackson 2010).

The work of the human imagination, it seems to me, is about becoming another, looking at the world from another perspective, even if, as in Proust, the writer becomes another Marcel, a kind of second literary self who narrates the story. But, for many of us, it means traveling farther, becoming a person of another sex or class or background or just someone funnier, tougher, and stranger than we are. I have argued that the multiple selves of an author's inner geography are created at the deep levels of her being, which includes the bodily music of her earliest forgotten interactions, as well as all the books she's read, the people she's loved and hated, and her memories, fantasies, hopes, and fears. Can we

say then that the process of writing is fundamentally different for a woman than for a man? Is the question, "Why one story and not another?" bound to one's sex?

If we internalize the sexism of the world, and we all do, how can it be escaped? Do women inevitably write differently from men because they have different bodies, menstruate, and can, at least potentially, give birth to children? Is *Frankenstein* a womanly book and *A Portrait of a Lady* a manly one? Margaret Cavendish's works were viewed as so masculine in her time that many refused to believe she had written them. Even Virginia Woolf was unable to see Cavendish's genius. In "A Room of One's Own" she refers to the seventeenth-century writer as "a vision of loneliness and riot [...] as if some giant cucumber had spread itself over the roses and carnations in the garden and choked them to death" (Woolf 1929: 62). Should women writers follow the French feminist Hélène Cixous's famous exhortation in *The Laugh of the Medusa:* "woman must write her self" (Cixous 1976: 875)? She advises women to disrupt syntax itself and all the forms of language that have been created by a phallocentric, logocentric patriarchal world. But what does this really mean? Could I ever get all those great books written by men out of me even if I tried? I doubt it. Would I want to? Haven't I always felt that men and women are a lot more the same than they are different? Am I wrong? Don't I find male characters lurking in me all the time? Should I not write them, too? If I borrow the terms of our culture with its stark divisions between masculine and feminine, do I not have aspects of both? Should I deny my masculinity for my femininity? Can't I be at once feminine and masculine?

Or, more ominously, it is often claimed these days that the female sex is doomed to literary mediocrity for bio-evolutionary reasons. Indeed, everywhere I turn, I run into glib pronouncements such as the following from a book by Brian Boyd called *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*, published in 2009. Boyd tells his reader that because males have more "reproductive variance" than females, they have a stronger competitive drive. What this means is that while few females don't become mothers, some males may be so successful with females, they produce offspring right and left, which deprives other males of reproductive opportunity, hence increasing competition among the guys for the girls. For Boyd, this desire to dominate other males extends to the art of storytelling. "From a tribal storyteller or Homer to Shakespeare or Tolkien," men, Boyd claims, have an edge. They are so intent on winning, in fact, that they are more likely than women to "engage in extreme behaviors," which in turn explains why they are "overrepresented at both extremes – success and genius, as well as failure." "Despite Murasaki, Jane Austen, and J.K. Rowling," Boyd tells us,

> males outnumber females as classic and even popular storytellers [...] while at the other end of the spectrum, males outnumber females by more than four to one in autism, which corresponds highly with poor performance in social cognition and pretend play. But females, while they do not seek status as urgently as males, also invest more in child-rearing and are the principal tellers of fictional stories, of folk tales and nursery rhymes, to their children. (Boyd 2009: 195)

In other words, women's stories are suitable for nurturing the undeveloped minds of children within the confines of domestic life, but woe to those who venture outside it into the agonistic literary world of bruising masculine competition.

Boyd's breezy sexism is typical of evolutionary approaches to contemporary culture. This is not because Darwin was wrong or evolutionary considerations are unimportant – far from it – but rather because the simplistic yoking of male reproductive variance to the fact that there have been and perhaps still are more men making literature than women is little more than a "just so" story to explain, and I would add, justify, why things are the way they are. Boyd violates one of the primary rules of science, which is never to confuse correlation with cause. His blithe use of autism, the cause of which is unknown, is an indictment in itself. One can only wonder how Boyd explains why there are far more women writers now that women have access to higher education than there were when they did not? Even the most witless of these evolutionary psychologists usually recognize social differences in human societies and what a highly evolved and plastic neocortex (the most recently evolved part of our brains that continually changes in relation to the environment) has made possible in human beings. There are a thousand rebuttals to sloppy thinking of this kind, most of which come from within science itself, but that does not make the Boyds of this world any less numerous.

Bad thinkers, and they are legion, take a theoretical model, whether it's computational theory of mind or crude evolutionism, and squeeze all of life, literature, and the kitchen sink into it. It does not matter if they are scientists or English professors, they ask poor questions because they have assumed far too much already. Assumptions are, after all, unexamined answers. "Why one story and not another?" is at the least a good question. Obviously, being a woman has influenced the stories I tell. I am a daughter, a sister, a wife, and a mother, and these roles have shaped who I am and the geography of that subliminal psychobiological terrain I mine for my fiction, but my stories have also been molded by my quirky nervous system, my ranging intellectual passions, insatiable reading habits, and, Boyd notwithstanding, my rank ambition and iron will to master whatever ideas, be they scientific or literary, that come my way.

The great enemy of thought and creativity is the received idea. The writer who gets his material from the ready-made platitudes of contemporary culture, no matter how famous he is, is doomed to oblivion. And as readers, we must be careful about bringing those same platitudes to the books we read. They can make us blind. The great force of literature lies precisely in its evocation of the particular life and lives of human beings that we are able to experience intimately with the protection of the "aesthetic illusion." In reading a novel, as in writing one, we shift our perspective and enter the world of another person to travel with her or him for the duration of the book. The story's truth or falseness lies in a resonance that is not easily articulated, but it is one that lives between reader and text – and that resonance is at once sensual, rhythmic, emotional, and intellectual. And this is possible because we are not rats, but imaginative beings who can leap out of ourselves and, for a while, at least, become someone else, young or old, sane or mad, woman or man.

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Gabriele Rippl

The Rich Zones of Genre Borderlands: Siri Hustvedt's Art of Mingling

1. Introduction: Beyond Postmodernism

This essay investigates Siri Hustvedt's negotiations with genre and genre boundaries in her novels. The blurring of genre boundaries is commonly considered as a typical feature of postmodernist fiction, and Hustvedt's novels have often been discussed within the postmodernist frame. Due to the novelist's indefatigable interest in topics such as the personal, the relational self, and intersubjective bonding, the postmodernist label of her works is becoming, however, increasingly questionable. Debates on American literature have recently announced the emergence of 'post-postmodernism' (Wallace 1993; Robert L. McLaughlin 2004; cf. Rippl 2013 for a detailed discussion) and the return of a 'new realism' (Rebein 2001; cf. also Claviez and Moos 2004). Nicoline Timmer (2010) describes this new aesthetics as one that goes beyond the cerebral character of postmodernist art by stressing ethical responsibility, affect, sincerity, and authenticity, thus embracing a fresh engagement with the real. The recent efforts of American novelists to communicate with the reader allow for communal bonding, emotional intensity, and mutuality, and leave exclusively self-reflexive, self-referential, ironic, metafictional strategies behind:

> [W]e can detect an incentive to move beyond what is perceived as a debilitating way of framing what it means to be human: the postmodern perspective on subjectivity. Most notable in the work of th[e] younger generation of writers is the emphatic expression of feelings and sentiments, a drive towards inter-subjective connection and communication [...]. Their texts perform a complicit and complicated critique on certain aspects of postmodern subjectivity, especially on the perceived solipsistic quality of the subjective postmodern experience world, and envision possible reconfigurations of subjectivity that can no longer be framed, I believe, as 'postmodern.' (Timmer 2010: 13)

Rebelling against the first generation of postmodernists and the sarcasm, cynicism, and irony which permeate their works, this new generation of writers "re-humanize[s] subjectivity" (Timmer 2010: 18 and passim). Recent historical events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center have functioned as turning points in the intellectual debate, "marking a change in how we think of our 'selves,' our identity, and in how we interpret our experience world" (Timmer 2010: 16 – 17). Likewise, emphatic feelings (and not merely cog-

nition) and a "restructuring of 'affect'" (Timmer 2010: 44) are highly relevant in fiction today, as are "other aspects of subjectivity, most notably the *interpersonal* construction of a sense of self," its sociality and connectivity (Timmer 2010: 22).

This short excursion into recent literary and cultural debates on American literature of the twenty-first century demonstrates that the changes in contemporary aesthetics – which include a concept of the self as relational – are important also for our discussion of Hustvedt's work. Interested in questions of consciousness and the linkage between mind and body, psyche and soma,[1] Hustvedt has declared herself "intellectually and emotionally dissatisfied with the airy postmodern subjects that seem never to put their feet on the ground" (Hustvedt 2013a: 118). She is equally unhappy about what analytical philosophy offers to explain human consciousness, which explains why she has come to privilege a phenomenological approach that bridges the psyche-soma ditch by seeing the personal corporeal perspective as crucial to the human experience and psyche. According to Hustvedt, the complex socio-psycho-biological model of self cannot be discussed within neat divisions and boundaries of disciplines, but needs borderlands as contact zones (cf. Pratt 1992) where boundaries are blurred and identities are hybridized:

> In my discussion of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and objectivity [...] I have actively worked to blur hard and fast borders. My intention is not to turn all thought to mush, but rather to create zones of focused ambiguity, to insist that 'diverse points of view' when examining the same object are not optional but necessary. For me ambiguity is a rich not an impoverished concept. (Hustvedt 2013a: 132)

One example of Hustvedt's philosophy of mingling is her neurological memoir, *The Shaking Woman, or, A History of My Nerves* (2010), which assembles discourses of neurology, psychoanalysis and life-writing. The manner in which Hustvedt, the critic and intellectual, engages in today's academic debates on subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and objectivity, is also relevant for her art of fiction

1 "In a world of hermetically isolated disciplines in which knowledge accumulates at a spectacular rate, and people know more and more about less and less, interdisciplinary conversation is no longer a luxury but a necessity. [...] The old separation of body and mind, psyche and soma continues to haunt us. This is a root issue, one that travels underground and interferes with our understanding of essential questions. Rampant philosophical naiveté in the so-called hard sciences and total ignorance of the biological body (as opposed to a constructed ideological one) in the humanities has created two deep but narrow ditches stretching ahead to nowhere. Dynamic narratives of subjective experience must modify the objective and mostly static theoretical models of science. In turn, the humanities can no longer afford to pretend that bodies are made entirely of words." (Hustvedt 2013b: 547 and 549)

that blurs boundaries demarcating literary genres from other literary genres and from non-literary ones. In what follows I scrutinize Hustvedt's juxtaposing and mixing of different genres and her nesting and braiding of multiple discourses of personal experience, philosophy, neuroscience and neurobiology, psychology, psychoanalysis and art history in her narrative fiction. Moreover, I ask about the specific functions of her intergeneric, interdisciplinary, and intermedial approach, which plays with the readers' genre expectations and habitual organization of knowledge. In her 2013 article "Borderlands: First, Second, and Third Person Adventures in Crossing Disciplines," Hustvedt states:

> Every theoretical construct, every system of ideas, every intellectual map created to explain us human beings is vulnerable at the site of incision – the place where we sever one thing from another. Without such dissections, there can be no formal thought, no discrete disciplines, no articulations of human experience. [...] For many years now, I have found my mental life parsed in multiple ways for the simple reason that I have been immersed in disciplines, which not only have distinct vocabularies, but may rest on different paradigms and employ different methodologies for understanding the big question I care most about: *What are we?* [...] Rules of knowing – how we can know what we know – lie beneath every edifice we call a discipline, and that knowing turns on perspective, first or third person, as well as notions of what is hard and soft. What is certain is that if we want to do the interdisciplinary dance, we must dislodge ourselves from a fixed place and begin to jump across borders and adopt alien views. (Hustvedt 2013a: 111–112)

While the (supposedly) objective third-person truth of the 'hard' sciences is commonly seen as opposed to the subjective first-person view of artistic truth, it is Hustvedt's project to bring the different discourses together in her novels. By mixing and 'dialogizing' the genre of narrative fiction with those of life-writing, ekphrasis, poetry, and drama, and by including excerpts from articles written in the 'objective' field of the life sciences, psychoanalytical material, and contributions from art historians, Hustvedt's literary texts are the summation of literary, scholarly, and scientific discourses and hence prime examples of genre juxtaposition and genre blending, i.e. of a successful bridging of the divide between the subjective and the objective.

2. Genre Theory: Genre Purity to Genre Hybridity

To discuss Hustvedt's practice of genre blurring, it is necessary to take a look at recent debates in the field of genre theory. The term 'genre' is derived from the biological term *genus*, and refers to a group of literary works that "share significant characteristics in terms of content, form and/or function" (Basseler and Nünning 2011: 12). Generic features and genre conventions help literary scholars

to classify works, through which authors can guide the recipients' expectations; they are "a set of cues guiding our reading of texts" (Frow 2006: 4). While 'genre' is a "universal dimension of textuality" (Frow 2006: 2), over time genre theorists have conceptualized this "universal dimension" in many different ways. Plato and Aristotle distinguished three literary types, namely epic, lyric, and dramatic; later, during the Renaissance and Neoclassicism, genre theorists favored generic hierarchies and understood genres as fixed and pure literary classifications. When the novel entered the stage in the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century and writers started to incorporate forms such as the letter and the diary in their texts, a parodying and blending/hybridizing of genres was established, and prescriptive and classificatory approaches to genre became increasingly hard to maintain (cf. Kearns 2008: 202). In the 1980s, scholars began to criticize the strong focus on genre classification and the deductive approaches to literary genres based on *a priori* definitions that went with it. As a result, inductive approaches based on description rather than prescription, on flexible definitions and on genre boundaries as elastic and porous (Friedman 1989: 16 – 17, 21 – 23) took over.[2]

Today literary genres are no longer conceived as essential, fixed, and stable 'types' or 'classes,' but as arbitrary modes of classification, as conventions structuring our experience of reality or as cognitive categories.[3] For Michael Kearns genre theory "reflects one of the fundamental realities of human cognition and communication: we understand and refer to phenomena by comparing them to existing categories and if necessary by modifying the categories or creating new ones" (Kearns 2008: 201). As Frow states, "genres actively generate and shape knowledge of the world" (Frow 2006: 2). As "a set of conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning," genres create "effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood" (Frow 2006: 10).

This survey has shown that, according to modern genre theory, genres are, first of all, pragmatic constructs that are based on social, socio-cultural, and literary consensus (cf. Vosskamp 2000: 256), and, secondly, only in theory "there is a system of distinct genres and types": in fact "the different kinds of texts actually form a continuum, with permeable and often blurred boundaries between the various categories" (Basseler and Nünning 2011: 13). In the field of genre research, few scholars have worked on blurred boundaries of genres. Alistair Fowler is one of them. He argues for looser genre categories which take into account

2 For an overview of genre theory in the twentieth century, cf. Duff 2000.

3 For different conceptualizations of genre, cf. Neumann and Nünning 2007: 11 – 15.

the historical flexibility of genres and differentiates between types of genre changes, among them (a) "aggregation" – an additive process, whereby "several complete short works are grouped in an ordered collection"; Fowler's example is Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which "represents a different genre from that of the tales it orders" (Fowler 1982: 171–172); (b) "inclusion" – "a literary work may enclose another within it. If the inset form then becomes conventionally linked with the matrix, a generic transformation has taken place" (Fowler 1982: 179; Fowler's example is *The Faerie Queen*, which contains "inset triumphal pageants, tapestry poems [...]," 179); and (c) "hybrid" – in the hybrid, the "most obvious form of generic mixture [...], two or more complete repertoires are present in such proportions that no one of them dominates" (Fowler 1982: 183); one of Fowler's examples is the Renaissance sonnet, which often includes an epigram.

Another important scholar is Mikhail Bakhtin, whose analyses of novelistic prose and the resulting concepts of dialogism, polyphony, polyphonic heterogeneity, and heteroglossia have heavily influenced the way critics have discussed the hybridization of genres over the last few decades. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929), Bakhtin characterizes Dostoevsky's poetics as having space for several dialogical voices and consciousnesses where no voice or consciousness dominates the others. Bakhtin's theory of 'dialogical imagination' and his dialogical model of self-consciousness also formed the theoretical basis of Siri Hustvedt's PhD research on Charles Dickens (cf. Marks 2014: 41–45) and inspired her conceptualizations of the relational self, but also her experiments with genre boundaries.

The category of hybrid genres in particular has recently received much attention. According to Christin Galster, hybrid genres are genres that have a mixed character; the term 'hybrid genre' is used

> to designate works of art which transgress genre boundaries by combining characteristic traits and elements of diverse literary and non-literary genres. [...] Although hybrid genres are highly innovative and contribute significantly to the development of novel forms of art, little sustained effort has been made to discuss the impact of generic crossings or to systematise their recent proliferation. (Galster 2008: 227)

Galster suggests reading the history of the novel in terms of hybridity and homogeneity, "with decidedly hybrid beginnings in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries (sic), a strong move towards homogenisation in the nineteenth-century (sic), and a similarly strong move towards hybridisation in the late twentieth century" (Galster 2008: 227). Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* (1981) as well as Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton* (1992) are often used as examples of late twentieth-century genre hybridisation in narrative fiction because they

> combine, transform, and subvert the conventions of several narrative sub-genres; break down the boundaries between fiction, poetry, and drama; import non-literary discourses and text-types; and employ narrative strategies that strive to imitate the organising principles of painting, music, and film. Hybrid narratives can be interspersed with short stories or fairy tales, poetry or drama; they confront the reader with scientific treatises, courtroom testimonies, film scripts, or cooking recipes. By transgressing genre boundaries, hybrid genres aim at distancing themselves from the homogeneous, one-voiced, and 'one-discoursed' worldview conventional narratives seem to suggest, a notion which is closely related to Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic imagination. Moreover, hybrid genres are intricately linked to the notion of hybrid identity, which is fluid, unstable, incessantly in search of and transforming itself. Due to their complex *gestalt*, hybrid genres are best approached with the help of theories of genre, hybridity, intermediality, and intertextuality. (Galster 2008: 227)

Although Galster has developed her list of features describing genre hybridization in connection with Silko and Thorpe, it clearly also applies to Hustvedt's novels. In spite of the fact that all hybrid novels do not conform to systematic genre concepts and neat taxonomies, generic 'mingling' – to use Hustvedt's own term (cf. two quotes below) – has had a long history; after all, hybridization allows for reinvigoration and further development of genres in general. Nevertheless, the blurring of genres has increased in the latter part of the twentieth century and is considered – as Linda Hutcheon also points out – a constitutive feature of postmodernist art practices:

> Postmodernism is a contradictory cultural enterprise, one that is heavily implicated in that which it seeks to contest. It [...] installs and only then subverts the conventions of genre. [...] [G]eneric blurring has been a feature of literature back to the classical epic and the Bible [...], but the simultaneous assertion and crossing of boundaries is more postmodern. (Hutcheon 1989: 55)

The juxtaposition and hybridization of genres can thus be seen as ways of translating "knowing into telling," as the "enabling conditions of possibility of sense-making" (Hutcheon 1989: 69 – 70). But although postmodernist critics talk about genre hybridization and "praised it as one of [postmodernism's] liberating forces, there are still, after some decades, no systematic approaches to the phenomenon" (Seibel 2007: 137).

3. The Novel as Hybrid: *The Sorrows of an American* (2008) – *The Summer without Men* (2011) – *The Blazing World* (2014)

In 2009, Siri Hustvedt discussed the generic nature of the novel:

> The novel is a chameleon. That is its glory as a genre. It can be an enormous waddling monster or a fast, lean sprite. It can take everything in or leave most things out. It is Tolstoy and Beckett. There are no rules for writing novels. Those who believe there are rules are pedants and poseurs and do not deserve a minute of our time. Modes of writing and various schools come and go: Grub Street, Naturalism, the nouveau roman, magical realism. The novel remains. The modern novel was born a hybrid, to borrow the Russian theorist M. M. Bakhtin's word for the genre's mingling, contradictory voices that shout and murmur from every level and corner of society. (Hustvedt 2009)

The inclusion, juxtaposition, aggregation, hybridization, and mingling of genres is a conspicuous feature in each of Hustvedt's six novels: The short story is an important ingredient in *The Blindfold* (1992), drama plays a major role in *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* (1996), and poetry figures large in *What I Loved* (2003). But in her three later novels, *The Sorrows of an American* (2008), *The Summer without Men* (2011) and *The Blazing World* (2014), genre hybridization reaches a new level.

In *The Sorrows of an American* Hustvedt discusses, in addition to desire, memory formation, loss, grief, and trauma induced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. She does so by inserting and including poetry as well as references to and excerpts from biographical, medical, neuro-/psychological and philosophical discourses. The novel engages with the traumatic events suffered by its disoriented characters – an engagement which leads to discontinuity and fragmentation of the narrative genre of the novel. Sonia Blaustein, one of the novel's protagonists, suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), having personally witnessed the fall of the Twin Towers and the death jump of victims. After 9/11 she starts to write lacunary poems characterized by missing stanzas: "There's supposed to be one about September eleventh next, but I haven't been able to write it. I've tried over and over again, but it's too hard. Maybe I'll just have a blank there – a nothing, a big empty spot with only the date" (Hustvedt 2008: 127; cf. also 189). These textual gaps stand for the "unspeakable images" and the "internal crack" they have opened in Sonia (230). In order to deal with personal and collective traumas, Hustvedt opts for a disarranged chronology, introduces various narrative strings and voices, foregoes a chapter structure, and works with repetitions. In addition to Sonia Blaustein's poems, Hustvedt includes lines from John Clare's

and Lewis Carroll's poetry (142 and 144) as well as fragmented passages and sentences, ekphrases of drawings and photographs, the descriptions of dreams, newspaper articles (171), letters (e. g. lines from one of Rilke's letters, 219) and excerpts from medical reports, and psychological and psychiatric discourses. The novel also incorporates references to and summaries of the notebook entries of Sonia's uncle, Erik Davidsen, the psychologist/psychiatrist-narrator of the novel. What is more, Hustvedt uses portions of her father's memoir – Lloyd Hustvedt, who died in 2003 – as a fictional memoir of Erik Davidsen's father (Hustvedt 2008: "Acknowledgments," 306). The passages taken from Lloyd Hustvedt's memoir are set in italics to differentiate them from the rest of the text. The different fonts as well as the indentations set these passages apart instead of incorporating them into the novel, hence exposing their alterity. Thus Hustvedt's poetics does not gloss over the sutures between the genres but exhibits them.

This is also the case in *The Summer without Men*, a novel about the poet-narrator Mia Fredricksen, who learns after thirty years of marriage that her husband, a world-renowned neuroscientist, leaves her for a much younger Frenchwoman. After a breakdown and a period in a psychiatric ward, Mia leaves New York to spend the summer in the prairie town of her childhood where her mother lives in an old people's home. Again, Hustvedt incorporates poems in her novel: poems by canonical authors which often express the protagonist's anguish and sorrow in a condensed and deeply emotional way, for instance in the case of Emily Dickinson's poem No. 193 (Hustvedt 2011: 6); there are poems by the poet-narrator, (7, 24, 42); poems by Lewis Carroll (14); John Clare's poem "I am" (31–32); Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's (51) and D. H. Lawrence's poetry (62) as well as Thomas Traherne's (136–137); and also poems written by the pupils of the protagonist's summer poetry workshop (49, 77). In addition, she includes her own line drawings (5, 59, 97, 175); long passages from her protagonist's notebook (22–23) and sex journal (52); letters to and from the protagonist as well as e-mail messages with an 'epistolary dialogue' (24–25, 39–40, 45, 54, 96, 131, 138–139, 140, 144, 153, 173–174); ekphrases of handicrafts created by a friend of the narrator's mother (35–36, 66–67, 162); passages on philosophy and neuroscience (60, 79, 98) and many intermedial references to film (e. g. 17, 181). As in *The Sorrows of an American*, the polyphony of voices and genres is exhibited by setting passages such as the poems apart from the rest of the text.

In her latest novel, *The Blazing World* (2014), this aesthetics of generic juxtaposing and hybridity is showcased even more strongly. Hustvedt's central thematic concern is the suffocating gender roles which straightjacket women, hindering them from developing their creativity. The novel's female protagonist is Harriet Burden, whose brilliant but unsuccessful attempts at gaining recognition for her provocative and daring installations fail in New York's male-dominated,

misogynist, vain, and money-driven art world until she conceals her female identity behind three male fronts (i. e. three male artists who pretend to be the creators of her installations). On many occasions Burden refers to Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, as a rich source of inspiration. The title of Hustvedt's novel evokes this seventeenth-century British aristocrat's prose work *The Blazing World* (1666), which is considered the forerunner of science fiction in English. To date, *The Blazing World* is Hustvedt's formally most daring work. Hustvedt's poetics is evident from the novel's cover of the first (hardcover as well as paperback) edition by Simon & Schuster in 2014: It shows torn pieces of red paper (or maybe canvas) which have been reassembled to form the background for the novel's title and genre designation ("a novel"). The individual paper scraps do not hide their fragmented nature and thus figure as a perfect image for Hustvedt's intricate novelistic technique with its scrapbook, collage-like character: The novel consists of a polyphonic spectrum of voices and incorporates a variety of genres which are barely stitched together. The structure is one of a book within a book; the novel does not simply unfold from the start: first there is an "Editor's Introduction," the editor being the fictive professor of aesthetics, I. V. Hess. Hess has gathered Harriet Burden's hundreds of pages of posthumous diaries and notebooks full of ekphrases, references to and discussions of artists, philosophers (phenomenologists in particular), psychologists and neurologists which he carefully edits with many scholarly footnotes. His publication also includes magazine clippings, written statements, edited transcripts, mock interviews with Burden's friends, enemies, family members (her daughter Maisie, a documentary filmmaker, and her son Ethan, an eccentric writer) and gallery owners, all of which are reminiscent of Bakhtin's carnivalesque and polyphonic, multiperspective novelistic universes.

In his insightful analysis of W.G. Sebald's generically 'unclassifiable' or rather 'multi-classifiable' work, Simon Cooke has recently contended that this work is "also quintessentially intermedial, woven through with photographs and other visual materials so endemically that even so non-descript a term as 'writing' is too inelastic to capture their basic form" (Cooke 2007: 235). This also holds true for Siri Hustvedt's fiction with its plethora of genres and rich literary visuality. In all her novels, Hustvedt uses intermedial strategies such as ekphrasis, a literary mode or genre with roots in Greek antiquity (cf. Rippl 2015). 'Notional ekphrases,' i. e. descriptions of fictional paintings and photographies, are central in Hustvedt's novels, lending them a striking visual quality (cf. Hartmann 2016; Hustvedt 2005; Grønstad 2012). Her novels *The Sorrows of an American* (2008), *The Summer without Men* (2011), and *The Blazing World* (2014) are again highly visual and intermedial (*The Summer without Men*, for instance, includes four line drawings by Hustvedt), and in all three novels Hustvedt makes copious

use of ekphrasis. This underlines how important Hustvedt considers visual works of art and visual media in general to be in our life-world and relational identity formations, which she discusses with respect to her protagonists and their involvements with works of art (cf. Marks 2014: 67–129; Zapf 2008).

4. Conclusion

A wide range of reasons for and functions of Hustvedt's genre experiments exist: Firstly, her mingling of genres corresponds to more general features of cultural context of her novels: Genre blurring and the increased employment of intermedial strategies (ekphrases, included drawings, etc.) are recurring characteristics in many contemporary literary texts. Secondly, Hustvedt's genre juxtaposing and mixing are the formal equivalents of her negotiation of the boundaries of the self, i.e. her notion of relational subjectivity and intersubjectivity. As we have seen, for Hustvedt identity is grounded in embodied material existence, and identity formation conceived as a relational process and complex product of conscious and unconscious interconnections with the environment – social, cultural, and biological (cf. Marks 2014: 5). To transfer her relational selves into written form, new modes of literary storytelling are needed, since the associative workings of the human mind and memory which interest Hustvedt cannot be incorporated without the playful and creative adaptation of formal and generic features of the novel. Hustvedt's art of fiction with its genre experimentation is heavily influenced by Bakhtin's concept of the dialogical imagination: She insists "on not compartmentalizing what is shared within one consciousness" and on not delimiting what is linked (Cooke 2007: 241). Hence, Hustvedt's "narrative approach – this weaving together the seemingly heterogeneous and disparate without regard for conventional disciplinary or generic boundaries" (Cooke 2007: 248) can thus be read as the formal expression of the writer's thematic preoccupations. There is, however, one additional and, indeed, important reason for Hustvedt's lack of generic coherence and the fact that the different generic components are barely stitched together: This technique is her literary response to traumatic experience which haunts many of her novels: "The adoption of a coherent generic form is to distance oneself from the inchoate experience of trauma itself; in this, genre is to experience what history is to memory: an intelligible but ultimately distancing and artificial adaptation" (Cooke 2007: 240). Confronting her readers in her hybrid novels with the different forms of knowledge generated by the various mixed genres, she plays with their expectations and allows them to question their habitual organization of knowledge, hence to perceive the (fictional) world in a fresh way that transgresses conventional homogeneous and